9: Lebanon G-5 (1952)1953 MEI Lebanon MEI

Land Operation

Hasty conclusions should not be drawn from the tables on land ownership, or the fact that three persons own 42 percent of the land area in the project villages and reside in the cities of Beirut and Saida. A condemnation of the system as representative of the absentee-owner «Feudal Lord» pattern would not be completely justified. Under the absentee-ownership system typical in the Middle East, the large landowner resides in the city or abroad and the land is rented on a share basis. The owner provides virtually no capital or supervision.

In order to render valid conclusions about the area under discussion it is essential that not only the ownership pattern but also the system of operation be examined. Although the three largest landowners, owning 11,300 dunums of land in the five project villages, reside in Beirut or Saida, they directly operate 82 percent of their lands or all but 2,000 dunums. It can be concluded that these examples are not actually ones of absenteeism. Many others of the large landowners who reside outside the villages are within an hour's drive from their lands and take a personal interest in them. Owners often directly operate a considerable portion of their holdings by employing labor from the nearby villages. Therefore their lands often are not let on a share-crop basis. The landlord invests his energy, capital, and managerial ability in the land, and the work of field laborers is closely supervised. In light of the meager credit facilities in Lebanon, the landowner serves as a valuable source of investment capital.

From scattered interviews with peasants, it appears that they would consider 100 dunums of dry land or 20 to 30 dunums of irrigated land as a suitable farm unit. This might be considered as the «family-sized farm». Unfortunately, it was found impractical to obtain data on the ownership and operation of dry and irrigated land separately. It is therefore difficult to generalize about the ability of the existing holdings to support their predominantly agricultural population. It is, however, possible to conclude that few people own or operate holdings sufficient to secure them livelihood. In Sarafand where 150 dunums are irrigated, 350 persons operate farms of less than 25 dunums (6 acres). This is predominantly an area of dry farming and farmers work far less land than is needed for actual subsistence. Completion of the Kasmie Irrigation project will materially increase the irrigated area in this kharaj.